

IIM-B upgrades I-T, India Post officials' managerial skills



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Leadership training may be new to officials working for the country's largest savings bank, India Post Office, or the income tax department, but the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore in association with top foreign universities, is all set to change that.

Some of IIM-B's professors have taken upon themselves the task of aligning the aspirations and managerial skills of employees to roles that The India Post and the Central Board of Direct Tax have charted out for them.

"If a Wipro or an Infosys can have training on client delivery models then why can't public institutes like the India Post Office?" asks Vasanthi Srinivasan, professor of organisational behaviour and human resource management, and faculty coordinator for the project in IIM-B. The training for India Post staffers began nearly six months ago, while that for income tax officials began on March 28. Through this programme, the Central Board of Direct Tax aims at improving employee efficiency and map the available talent.

Besides honing managerial skills, the training will also boost the department's forecasting methods. They will be able to identify which tax returns should be audited and which should be left out, according to Nagadevara, one of the directors for the I-T officers' programme and a former IIM-B dean. Being exposed to the best practices is also expected to help them come up with better public policies. Under a separate programme, which also began in March, 600 commissioners are being trained for three weeks at IIM-B and two weeks at the Maxwell School of Public Policy in New York State and other institutes abroad.

Nagadevara and his team along designed a survey of 270 questions, which would rate commissioners on their aspirations, experience, aptitude towards different policies, according to which they would be grouped into teams like investigation, transfer pricing, advocacy, taxpayer service and international mergers and acquisitions. Those who have been in one

stream but are suited for a different role would accordingly be moved, says Nagadevara.

"A better policy would mean more cash flows for the government, which is what the team will be trained to do," he says.

At India Post Office, at least seven professors are training top-level officers, including post master generals on strategy management and improve their customer delivery systems. Industry experts from insurance were brought in as guest faculty. The trainees were divided into groups and made to brainstorm on how they could achieve their goals.

The 247-year-old post office is joining the e-brigade with its large

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business and insurance portfolio and is going deeper into rural markets, for which it needs ways of logistics tracking and re-skilling of its workforce. "A top-down method is used where the employees are taught timely delivery, and trained in parameters like retaining customers, performance management or marketing the right customer service," says Srinivasan.

A director of the postal services in the southern region, who was part of the training a few months ago, said the programme focused on succession planning and how to reach targets in the next 10 years.

A direct result of the training is that changes made in the departments are being formed to track performance and other HR issues. Another change is that now examinations will be held for postal assistants who aspire to be post master generals and so on. "Earlier, it was about seniority and now it will be about aptitude," the director, who did not wish to be named, said.

Although the postal service has a results framework document, which states the different parameters of measurement and targets for each of them, IIM-B is helping them understand how to answer the 'what next' question.

Indian Forest Service officials are next in queue for training.